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14. ABSTRACT Providing Special Operations Forces (SOF) operators with opportunities for career advancement based on their language proficiency is one potential way to motivate them to acquire and maintain proficiency. This report describes opinions of SOF operators and leaders about whether language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process. SOF operators and leaders reported mixed opinions, with the largest percentage indicating that language should not be considered in the promotion process. The following issues need to be considered by decision-makers when considering including language proficiency as part of the SOF promotion policy: (1) prioritization of language proficiency in relation to other SOF skills, (2) consideration of impact on native versus non-native speakers, (3) consideration of language difficulty and language level, and (4) consideration of barriers that may interfere with acquisition and maintenance of language proficiency.					
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Special Operations Forces Language and Culture Needs Assessment Project: Considering Language in the Promotion Process



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Motivating Special Operations Forces (SOF) operators to acquire and maintain language proficiency is an important goal for leaders in the SOF community. One potential motivator for developing job-related skills, as mentioned in focus group discussions, would be incorporating language proficiency as a contributor to career advancement or promotion. Although language proficiency tied to specific Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) levels is not currently considered in the promotion process for SOF operators, it is possible that it could be in the future. This report describes opinions from SOF operators and leaders about whether language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process. This information can be used by USSOCOM and SOF component policymakers to identify the advantages and disadvantages of including language proficiency in the promotion process in the event that this is considered. This report also identifies potential issues that could arise and concerns from those who would be directly impacted (i.e., SOF operators and leaders) by a policy change.

SOF operators and leaders reported mixed opinions about whether language proficiency should be considered in the SOF promotion process. Overall, SOF operators and leaders most frequently indicated that language should *not* be considered in the promotion process (51% and 41%, respectively). Alternatively, some SOF operators and leaders indicated that language should *maybe* be considered in the SOF promotion process (23% and 26%, respectively), and some operators and leaders indicated that language should *definitely yes* be considered (26% and 33%, respectively).

If leaders decide to incorporate language proficiency into the promotion process, comments provided by SOF operators and leaders can be used to develop recommendations for structuring policy to include language proficiency so that it is the most effective and gains the most support from the SOF community. Decision-makers can refer to the following recommendations, associated with findings from this study, when considering including language proficiency in the SOF promotion process:

- *Carefully consider the appropriate emphasis on language proficiency in relation to other SOF skills already included in promotion policy.* The most frequent comment theme brought up by SOF operators and leaders was that language proficiency should not be part of the promotion process because it is not indicative of good leadership or other SOF skills. Fewer comments indicated that language proficiency is important for SOF missions. These comments suggest that language proficiency is viewed as necessary for the job and mission, but language skills are not related to increasing leadership and responsibility in SOF or to other SOF skills that are mastered over time.
- *When developing policy, consider the implications for native speakers of the language.* A common concern expressed in the comments was that inclusion of language proficiency in the promotion process would provide an unfair advantage for native speakers of the language. A promotion process needs to be perceived as fair and equitable by personnel in the organization (Greenberg, 1987). Non-native speaking SOF operators are likely to dedicate more time to language learning and maintenance than native speakers, assuming that native speakers are assigned to their native language. This inequity is likely to affect the perceived fairness of the promotion process. Appropriate caveats should be made to ensure that the policy is not perceived as favoring or biased toward native speakers of the language.

- *When developing policy, consider both language difficulty and proficiency level.* A promotion policy that includes language proficiency should consider the language difficulty and level of proficiency, just as is done for foreign language incentive pay (i.e., Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus [FLPB]). This will ensure that members of the SOF community perceive the policy to be fair. Comments indicated concerns that including language proficiency in the promotion process would be unfair for SOF operators who are assigned to more difficult languages because it is more difficult for these individuals to reach the same proficiency level as someone in a less difficult language. Another situation to consider is when operators are proficient in multiple languages. In these cases, like for foreign language incentive pay (i.e., FLPB), the promotion process could recognize proficiency in languages other than an operators' official or required AOR language as demonstration of language skills. This consideration could be especially important given the current operational environment, which requires many SOF operators to deploy outside their area of responsibility (AOR) and, therefore, use a language other than their required AOR language.
- *Be aware of barriers that may interfere with acquisition and maintenance of language proficiency and how those barriers may impact promotion policy.* Lack of time (due to deployments) and lack of language learning aptitude were the two most common barriers identified by SOF personnel. Providing multiple routes to achieve the same goal (i.e., promotion) will most likely lead to the best outcomes and increase perceived fairness of the process. As some respondents suggested, it may be helpful to treat language proficiency as an enhancer rather than an inhibitor of career advancement. Another barrier that can have implications for the perceived fairness of including language in the promotion policy is the lack of opportunity for SOF operators to use and practice their language abilities (*Barriers to Language Acquisition and Maintenance*, Technical Report #2010011024). Due to the current operational environment, many SOF operators deploy outside their AOR, which lessens the opportunity for them to use and develop their official or required AOR language. For example, if a SOF operator's official or required AOR language is Chinese, but the operator never deployed to or visited a Chinese-speaking region or community, then this individual does not have the opportunity to use his or her language skills in the field, and, therefore, this individual will have a more difficult time maintaining or improving his or her proficiency.

Although there are many issues to consider when deciding whether to include language proficiency as part of the SOF promotion process, addressing these issues can lead to promotion becoming a powerful incentive for SOF operators to acquire and maintain language skills. Inclusion of language proficiency into the SOF promotion process would demonstrate the importance of language skills to SOF missions. However, the consequences should be carefully considered. If language is integrated into the promotion system, the requirement could become a barrier to promotion for some and create other issues. How the language requirement is structured and which issues are addressed will determine its impact for individuals and the organization. Decision-makers must consider multiple options and determine which choice maximizes the incentive value of promotion for achieving organizational goals, including increased language proficiency. If a decision is made to include proficiency in the promotion process, the following issues will need to be addressed when structuring the requirement to avoid resistance from those affected: 1) prioritization of language proficiency in relation to other SOF skills, 2) consideration of

impact on native versus non-native speakers, 3) consideration of language difficulty and language level, and 4) consideration of barriers. Another option for including language in the promotion process would be to include maintenance of the minimum language proficiency standard into the promotion policy. This would enforce the minimum proficiency requirement already in place for SOF operators and would further motivate operators to maintain their proficiency because of its impact on career advancement.

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SECTION I: REPORT AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Considering Language in Promotion Process Report Purpose

This report describes opinions from Special Operations Forces (SOF) operators and leaders about considering language proficiency in SOF promotion processes. Respondents to the *2009 SOF Language and Culture Needs Assessment (LCNA)* survey provided their thoughts on whether language proficiency should be considered in their promotion process and any potential consequences or issues that could arise if it were to be included in the promotion process.

Promotion is a fundamental career incentive for SOF personnel and is associated with higher levels of responsibility, prestige, and compensation; therefore, SOF personnel have a powerful incentive to learn and master the skills tied to the promotion process. In the future, language proficiency could be enforced as an additional criterion in the promotion process because language proficiency is an important contributor to SOF mission success (*Inside AOR Use of Language*, Technical Report #2010011010; *Outside AOR Use of Language*, Technical Report #2010011011), and language skills are readily measurable using official tests such as the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).

The promotion processes in the Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force use their own, service-specific weighted systems in which enlisted members above a certain grade (typically E-5 and above) accumulate promotional points based on skill sets, time-in-service, and time-in-grade to help determine if and when an individual receives a rank-based promotion (Active and Reserve Enlisted Selections and Promotions, 2010; Airman Promotion Program, 2009; Marine Corps Promotional Manual, 2006; Navy Performance Evaluation System, 2008). Enlisted members at or below the grade of E-4 earn near automatic promotions given time-in-service and time-in-grade, with the exception of the Army and the Marine Corps, which use the E-3 grade and below as their near automatic promotion grade (Active and Reserve Enlisted Selections and Promotions, 2010; Marine Corps Promotional Manual, 2006). Each branch's weighted points system varies based on the given skill sets (e.g., weapons qualifications) necessary for their missions, and each has different cutoff levels for who is considered for promotions. However, unlike the other services, the Army has language requirements tied to promotion for some personnel.

Currently, Army policies include language proficiency as a required characteristic for Army SOF (ARSOF) officers, warrant officers (WOs), and non-commissioned officers (NCOs); however, the definition of "language proficiency" is not clear. Initially, ARSOF operators must meet an initial language proficiency of 1/1 on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) upon completion of initial acquisition training (IAT). However, Army promotion policies do not clarify the language proficiency standards for sustainment or enhancement of these skills. For example, the *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Department of the Army, Pamphlet 600-3) pamphlet states that ARSOF officers and warrant officers must "have an aptitude for learning a foreign language and must sustain foreign language proficiency throughout their careers" (p. 161). Further, the policy states that for every officer and WO rank, individuals should maintain and enhance regional and linguistic expertise. Similar statements about language proficiency are made in the *U.S. Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide* (Department of the Army, Pamphlet 600-25); however, the language

proficiency needed for certain ARSOF military occupational specialties (MOSs) are more specified: “the goal for all SF NCOs is sustainment at a minimum level 1 proficiency” (p. 82).

Although language proficiency is documented as a promotion requirement for ARSOF officers, WOs, and NCOs, it is not clear specifically how it is defined or whether this requirement is being enforced in the ARSOF promotion system or evaluation/standard. One potential reason for why it is not applied as a required condition for promotion is the vague, non-measurable reference to language proficiency in Army policies. For example, ARSOF Majors are expected to engage in self-development to “maintain and enhance their foreign language and cultural proficiency” (*U.S. Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Guide*, p. 163). This description does not specify the proficiency level needed to satisfy this requirement; therefore, it is not possible to enforce language proficiency requirements if none are identified in existing policies. Standards need to be specific and measurable to be effective.

Language proficiency is one of many important skills needed for executing SOF missions. Including language proficiency in the SOF promotion policy across services would enhance the importance of this skill and would motivate SOF operators to engage in language acquisition and maintenance. However, adding any factor into a promotion process must be evaluated prior to implementation. Part of this evaluation involves assessing attitudes and opinions about the potential addition of the skill to the promotion policy from those whose promotion status would be affected. Section II of this report details opinions of SOF operators and leaders regarding adding language into the promotion process. Section III summarizes the main findings and provides conclusions and next steps for USSOCOM policymakers. Appendix A details the 2009 *SOF LCNA Project*, and Appendix B provides an overview of report methodology, including participants, measures, and analyses. Appendix C presents comment themes, including definitions and exemplar comments. Appendix D presents comment code frequencies for operator and leader comments.

LCNA Project Purpose

The Special Operations Forces Language Office (SOFLO) commissioned the 2009 *SOF LCNA Project* to gain insights on language and culture capability and issues across the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The goal of this organizational-level needs assessment is to inform strategy and policy to ensure SOF personnel have the language and culture skills needed to conduct their missions effectively. Data were collected between March and November, 2009 from personnel in the SOF community, including operators and leaders. Findings, gathered via focus groups and a web-based survey, will be presented in a series of reports divided into three tiers. The specific reports in each of these tiers will be determined and contracted by the SOFLO. *Tier I* reports focus on specific, limited issues (e.g., *Inside AOR Use of Language*). *Tier II* reports integrate and present the most important findings across related *Tier I* reports (e.g., *Use of Language and Culture on Deployment*) while including additional data and analysis on the topic. One *Tier III* report presents the most important findings, implications, and recommendations across all topics explored in this project. The remaining *Tier III* reports present findings for specific SOF organizations [e.g., Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Special Forces (SF) Command]. Two foundational reports document the methodology and

participants associated with this project. Report topics are determined by the SOFLO and are subject to change.

Relationship of *Considering Language in Promotion Process* to the LCNA Project

Findings from this report will be integrated with other *Tier I* reports, *Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus*, *Non-monetary Incentives*, *Barriers to Language Acquisition and Maintenance*, and *Force Motivation for Language*, into a *Tier II* report, *Incentives/Barriers* (Appendix A presents the report structure). However, final reports produced are subject to change and will be determined by the SOFLO.

SECTION II: CONSIDERING LANGUAGE IN PROMOTION PROCESS

This section details SOF operators' and leaders' opinions on whether language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process and the potential consequences or issues that could arise if implemented.

Research Questions

This section addresses the following questions:

- Do SOF operators and leaders think that language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process?
- Are there differences across relevant subgroups (e.g., language assignment difficulty, current proficiency, tenure) regarding whether language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process?
- What reasons did SOF operators and leaders give for why language proficiency should or should not be considered in the promotion process?

Main Findings

Currently, language proficiency requirements are not included in the SOF career promotion process in a meaningful way. Focus group discussions illustrated that promotion/career advancement would be an incentive for SOF operators to acquire and maintain language proficiency. However, consistent with 2009 LCNA survey comments, focus group participants explained that although language is important for mission success, language training can take away from other training opportunities that may increase the chances of being promoted (e.g., jump school). This implies that language acquisition and maintenance would be more motivating to achieve if it was valued more in the promotion process.

Although SOF leaders were more likely than SOF operators to advocate for including language in the promotion process, both groups reported a wide range of responses. Overall, 51% ($n = 533$) of SOF operators indicated that language should *definitely not* or *probably not* be considered in the promotion process. However, 23% ($n = 235$) of SOF operators indicated that language should *maybe* be considered, and 26% ($n = 260$) indicated that it should *probably yes* or *definitely yes* be considered in the promotion process (Figure 1, p. 10). This same trend was found with SOF leader responses, 41% ($n = 313$) said that language should *definitely not* or *probably not* be considered, 26% ($n = 206$) said it should *maybe* be considered, and 33% ($n = 264$) said that it should *probably yes* or *definitely yes* be considered in the promotion process (Figure 1, p. 10).

SOF operators with lower language proficiency levels may believe that their current proficiency would constrain their chances of promotion if language were included in the promotion process. Opinions about whether language should be considered in the promotion process differed depending on SOF operators' self-rated speaking proficiency; specifically, SOF operators who self-rated their speaking proficiency at Level 0 (Interagency Language Roundtable [ILR] 0 and 0+) or Level 1 (ILR 1 and 1+) were less likely to endorse language in the promotion process than those with more advanced proficiency levels.

SOF operators assigned to more difficult languages may not believe it is fair for language to be a consideration in the promotion process because it is perceived as more difficult for them to achieve higher levels of proficiency than personnel assigned to less difficult languages. Endorsement of language in the promotion process differed depending on SOF operators' assigned AOR language difficulty. SOF operators assigned to Category IV (CAT IV) languages were less likely to endorse including language in the promotion process than those assigned to CAT I, II, or III (i.e., less difficult) languages.

Most comments addressed reasons for why language proficiency should *not* be considered in the promotion process (Figure 5, p. 14). The top three reasons included: 1) language proficiency does not indicate good SOF skills/leadership skills, 2) there would be a disadvantage for SOF operators assigned to more difficult languages, and 3) there would be an unfair advantage for native speakers.

In addition to those who opposed including language proficiency as a consideration for promotion, other comments identified barriers to language acquisition and maintenance that make the inclusion of language proficiency in the promotion process unfair (Figure 8, p. 20). Comment themes included: 1) differing language learning aptitudes, 2) lack of time to engage in language training opportunities, 3) mismatch between required AOR language and language used on outside AOR deployments, 4) low command emphasis on language proficiency, and 5) unequal access to training opportunities.

Although many respondents opposed the inclusion of language proficiency as part of promotion decisions, there were many SOF operators and leaders who provided survey comments that addressed reasons why language *should* be considered. Other than general endorsement, most respondents argued that language proficiency should be part of the promotion process because language proficiency is important for SOF missions (Figure 6, p. 16).

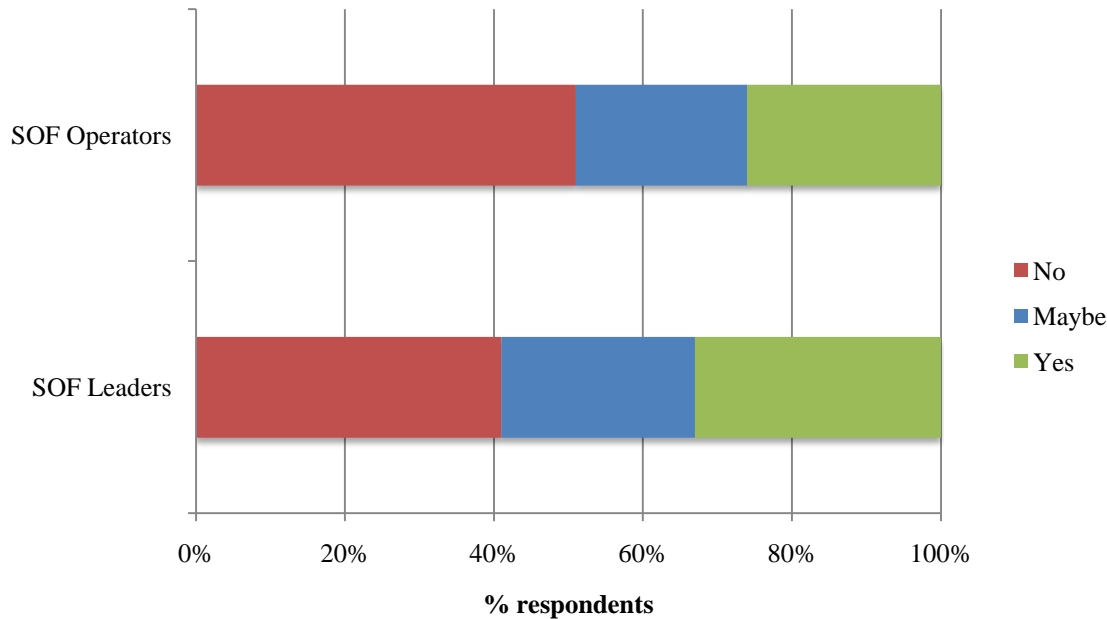
Some SOF operator and leader comments explained that language proficiency should be considered part of the promotion process, but only under certain conditions (Figure 7, p. 18). For example, some comments indicated that language should only be considered if alternative considerations (e.g., bonus points) are available. This would allow SOF operators with inadequate language proficiency, but adequate skills in other job-relevant areas, to still be considered for promotion. Additionally, some comments stated that language proficiency should be considered for jobs (e.g., some MOSs) that require advanced language skills. This would maximize the job-relatedness of the promotion system. Lastly, some comments said that language should only be included in the promotion process if all SOF operators are provided with the same (i.e., consistent) language training. Otherwise, not all individuals would receive the same opportunities to develop their language skills.

Detailed Findings

Closed-ended Item Responses

There was a wide range of opinions about whether language should be considered part of the promotion process (Figure 1, p. 10). Overall, 51% ($n = 533$) of SOF operators indicated that language should *definitely not* or *probably not* be considered in the promotion process. However, 23% ($n = 235$) of SOF operators indicated that language should *maybe* be considered, and 26% ($n = 260$) indicated that it should *probably yes* or *definitely yes* be considered in the promotion process. This same trend was found with SOF leader responses, 41% ($n = 313$) said that language should *definitely not* or *probably not* be considered, 26% ($n = 206$) said it should *maybe* be considered, and 33% ($n = 264$) said that it should *probably yes* or *definitely yes* be considered in the promotion process.

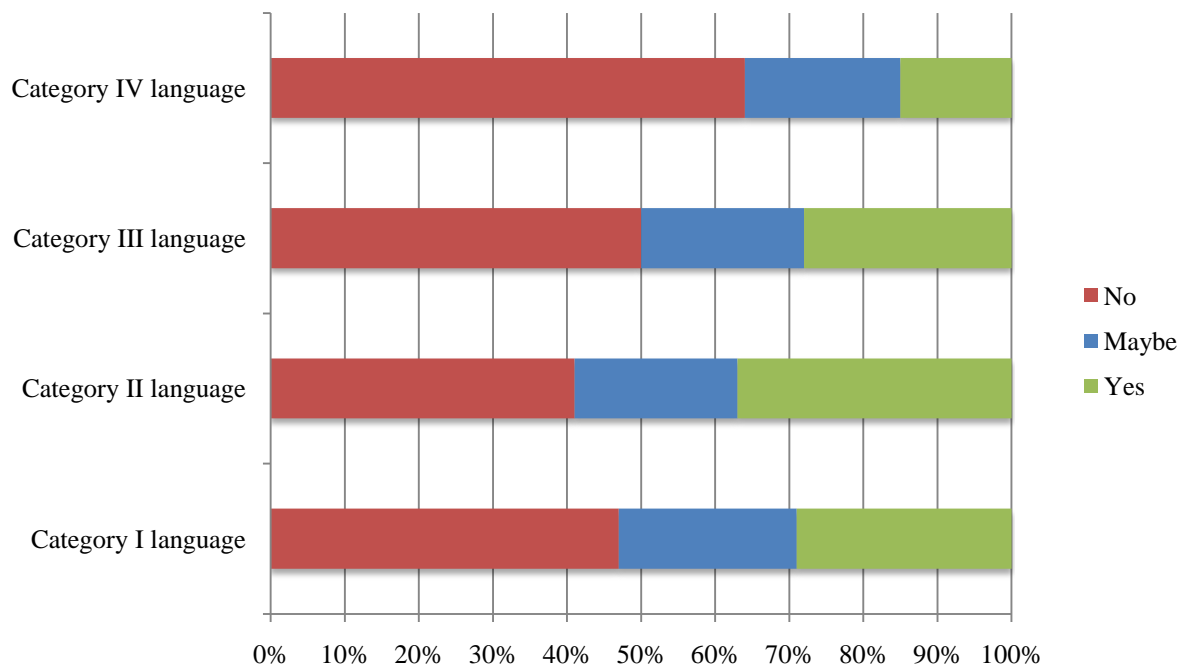
Figure 1. Consideration of Language in Promotion Process



Note. SOF Operators: $n = 1,028$, $M = 1.73$; SOF Leaders: $n = 783$, $M = 1.94$. Responses were made on the following scale: 1 = *Definitely not*, 2 = *Probably not*, 3 = *Maybe*, 4 = *Probably yes*, 5 = *Definitely yes*. *Definitely not* and *Probably not* responses were combined into the “No” category; *Maybe* responses remained in the “Maybe” category; *Definitely yes* and *Probably yes* were combined into the “Yes” category.

For SOF operators, there were differences in responses across language difficulty and current speaking proficiency level. SOF operators assigned to CAT IV languages were less likely to endorse the inclusion of language into the promotion process than those assigned to CAT I, II, or III languages (Figure 2, p. 11). One potential explanation for this finding is that SOF operators who are assigned to CAT IV languages may be less interested in language being a factor in promotions because they may have more difficulty reaching advanced proficiency levels than individuals assigned to CAT I, II, and III languages.

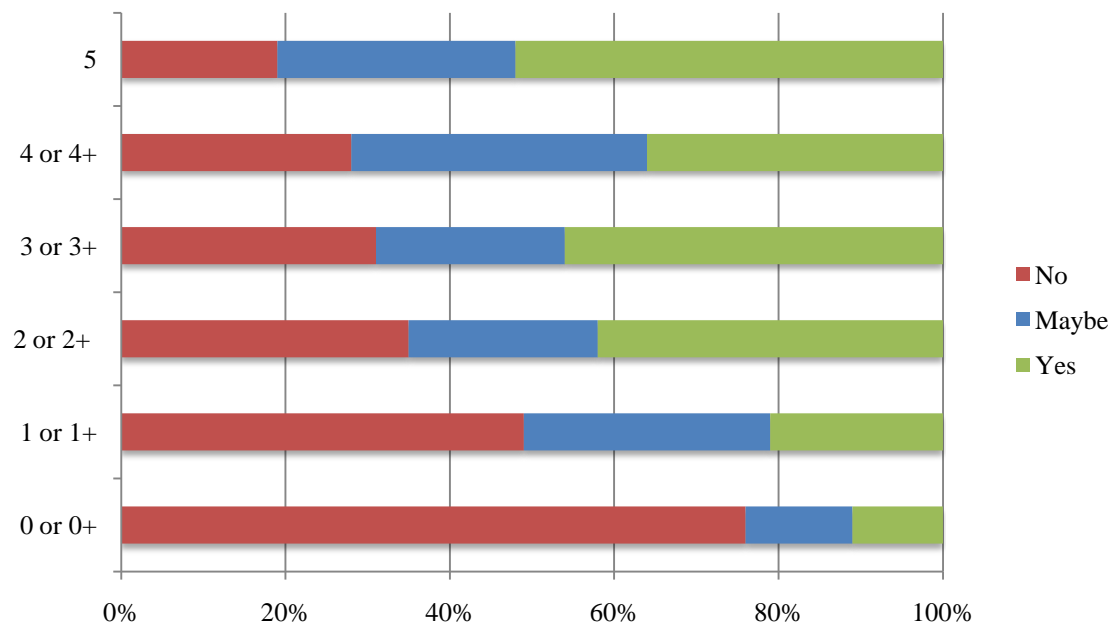
Figure 2. Consideration of Language in Promotion Process by Language Difficulty



Note. Category I language: $n = 397$, $M = 1.81$; Category II language: $n = 90$, $M = 1.96$; Category III language: $n = 166$, $M = 1.79$; Category IV language: $n = 285$, $M = 1.50$. Responses were made on the following scale: 1 = *Definitely not*, 2 = *Probably not*, 3 = *Maybe*, 4 = *Probably yes*, 5 = *Definitely yes*. *Definitely not* and *Probably not* responses were combined into the “No” category; *Maybe* responses remained in the “Maybe” category; *Definitely yes* and *Probably yes* were combined into the “Yes” category.

Additionally, SOF operators whose current, self-rated speaking proficiency is at Level 0 (ILR 0 and 0+) or Level 1 (ILR 1 and 1+) were less likely to endorse the inclusion of language into the promotion process than SOF operators with more advanced proficiency levels (i.e., Levels 2, 3, 4, and 5; Figure 3, p. 12). This suggests that SOF operators with lower self-rated speaking proficiency may not believe that their proficiency is high enough to benefit them (or is low enough that it may hurt them) if language proficiency were to be considered in the promotion process.

Figure 3. Consideration of Language in Promotion Process by Speaking Proficiency

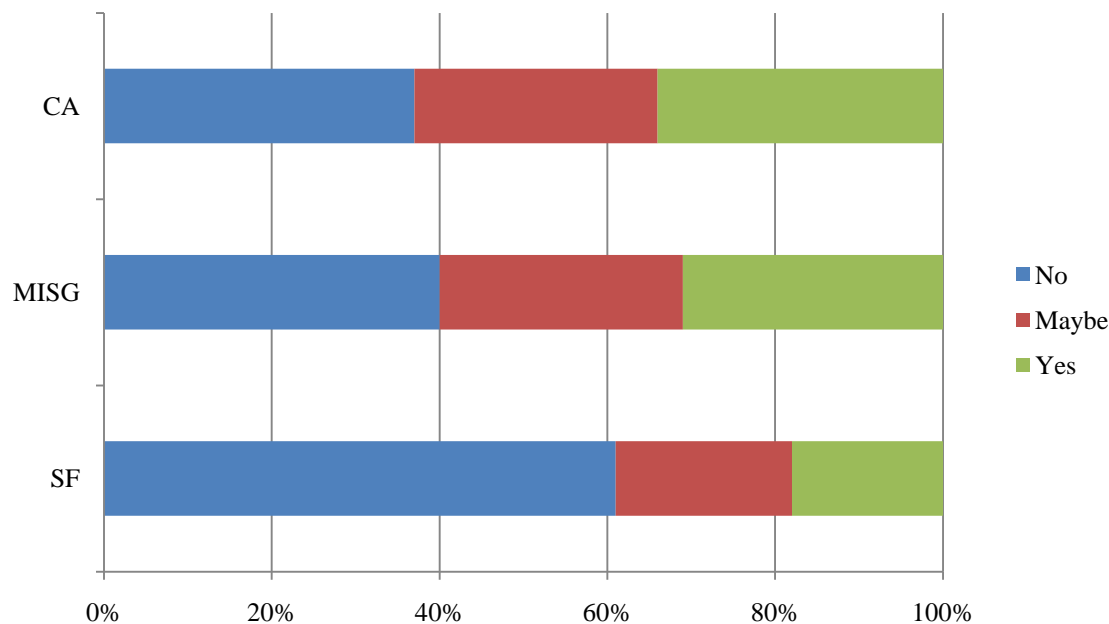


Note. Level 0 or 0+: $n = 301$, $M = 1.35$; Level 1 or 1+: $n = 298$, $M = 1.71$; Level 2 or 2+: $n = 177$, $M = 2.06$; Level 3 or 3+: $n = 61$, $M = 2.15$; Level 4 or 4+: $n = 11$, $M = 2.09$; Level 5: $n = 31$, $M = 2.32$. Responses were made on the following scale: 1 = *Definitely not*, 2 = *Probably not*, 3 = *Maybe*, 4 = *Probably yes*, 5 = *Definitely yes*. *Definitely not* and *Probably not* responses were combined into the “No” category; *Maybe* responses remained in the “Maybe” category; *Definitely yes* and *Probably yes* were combined into the “Yes” category.

Differences were found across Army SOF type (i.e., Civil Affairs [CA], Military Information Support Group¹ [MISG], and Special Forces [SF]); CA ($M = 1.97$, $n = 150$) and MISG ($M = 1.90$, $n = 121$) operators were more likely to endorse the inclusion of language proficiency in the promotion process than SF operators ($M = 1.56$, $n = 466$; Figure 4, p. 13). However, CA and MISG operators were also more likely to have higher self-rated speaking proficiency because they have a higher proficiency standard (ILR 2/2) than SF operators (ILR 1/1). This pattern was also found across USASOC organizations; SOF operators from 4th MISG ($M = 1.88$, $n = 114$) and 95th CAB ($M = 1.97$, $n = 143$) were more likely to endorse the inclusion of language in the promotion process than SOF operators from 3rd SFG ($M = 1.39$, $n = 80$) and 5th SFG ($M = 1.43$, $n = 122$).

¹ Formerly referred to as Psychological Operations Group (POG)

Figure 4. Consideration of Language in Promotion Process by Army SOF Type



Note. CA: $n = 150$; MISG: $n = 121$; SF: $n = 466$.

Differences were found across SOF leader positions; Staff Officers were more favorable toward including language proficiency in the promotion process ($M = 2.04$, $n = 363$) than Commanders ($M = 1.91$, $n = 316$) and Senior Warrant Officer Advisors (SWOAs)/Senior Enlisted Advisors (SEAs; $M = 1.65$, $n = 104$).

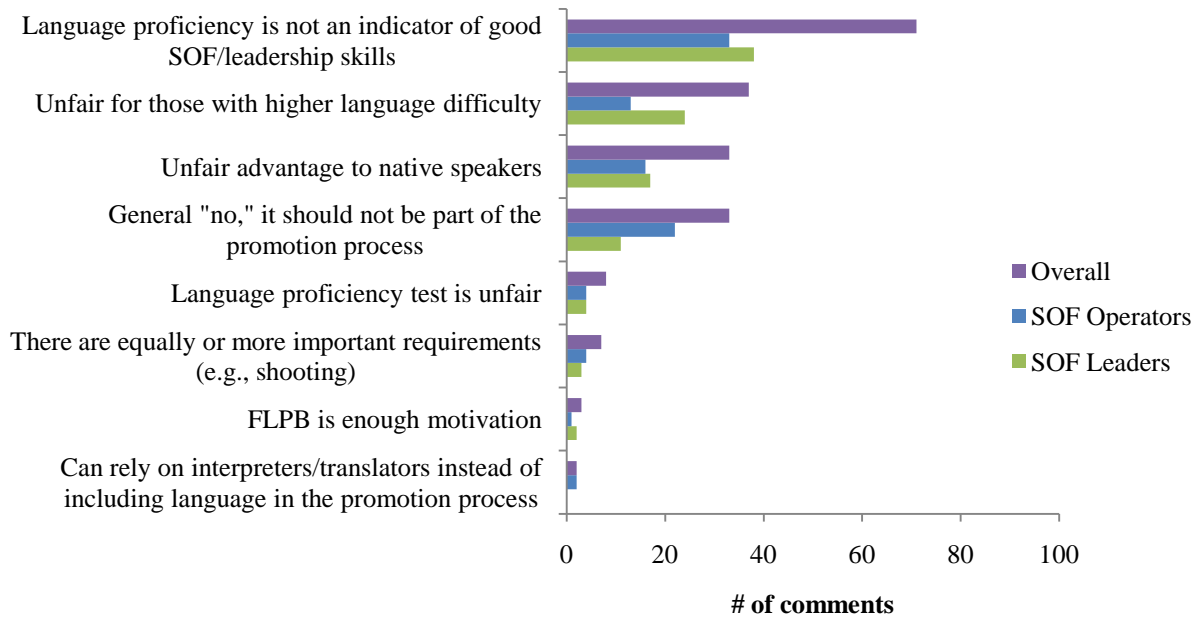
One difference was found when looking within pay grade for SOF operators; SOF operators in the E6 pay grade were more likely to endorse the inclusion of language in the promotion process ($n = 241$, $M = 1.82$) than SOF operators in the E8 pay grade ($n = 161$, $M = 1.56$).

Open-ended Survey Comments

SOF operators and leaders provided comments regarding the inclusion of language proficiency in the promotion process. In this section we will review comments indicating why language proficiency: 1) should *not* be considered in the promotion process, 2) should be considered, and 3) should be considered if certain conditions are met (e.g., everyone receives equivalent or comparable training). In addition, this section includes a review of barriers that can affect SOF operators' language learning and maintenance (e.g., lack of time to train, outside AOR deployments).

Reasons why language proficiency should not be considered part of the promotion process. SOF operators and leaders provided their thoughts about why language proficiency should *not* be considered part of the promotion process (Figure 5, p. 14).

Figure 5. Comments Against Inclusion of Language Proficiency in Promotion Process



Note. Comment code (i.e., theme) definitions are presented in Appendix C. A complete list of the theme frequencies is presented in Appendix D.

The most frequent reason why language proficiency should not be considered in promotions was that it is not an indicator of good SOF/leadership skills ($n = 71$). Most of the comments in this category represent the viewpoint that language ability is secondary to SOF warrior or SOF leadership skills and that having language proficiency does not necessarily make someone a good leader.

"I have seen plenty of people who are proficient in a language but know nothing about leading."

SOF Operator, USSOCOM operational unit

"I would prefer a commander who is a solid warrior and leader over one who is a superb linguist."

SOF Operator, TRADOC

"language has nothing to do in the way people are able to lead and be a leader."

SOF Operator, 5th SFG

Other reasons that SOF operators and leaders advocate against language proficiency being part of the promotion process included the disadvantage for those assigned to more difficult languages ($n = 37$) and the unfair advantage to native speakers ($n = 33$).

Disadvantage for those assigned to more difficult languages:

“Some languages are extremely hard to learn, therefore people who have easy languages will be looked at more favorably than people who have hard languages”

SOF Operator, 4th MISG

“It wouldn't be fair to promote guys because they are proficient in a language like Spanish instead of a guy who has Chinese Mandarin.”

SOF Operator, 1st SFG

“All languages are not the same, using language as a criteria would give the Soldiers assigned a CAT I language an unfair advantage over Soldiers assigned CAT IV or V languages.”

SOF Leader, 5th SFG

“someone who has a 3/3 in Spanish should not be given promotion points over a 1/1 in Chinese. the languages are not equal and the training time required is not equal”

SOF Leader, USSOCOM headquarters

Unfair advantage to native speakers:

“SHOULD NOT BE A CONSIDERATION, IT WILL NOT BE FAIR SINCE SOME OF US ARE NATIVE SPEAKERS”

SOF Operator, 7th SFG

“Because some people are native speakers of some of the languages and puts them at an unfair advantage of people who were not brought up in foreign countries or having foreign parents.”

SOF Operator, USSOCOM operational unit

“English as a second language soldiers will have an unfair advantage over somebody more qualified for promotion.”

SOF Operator, Deployed SO unit

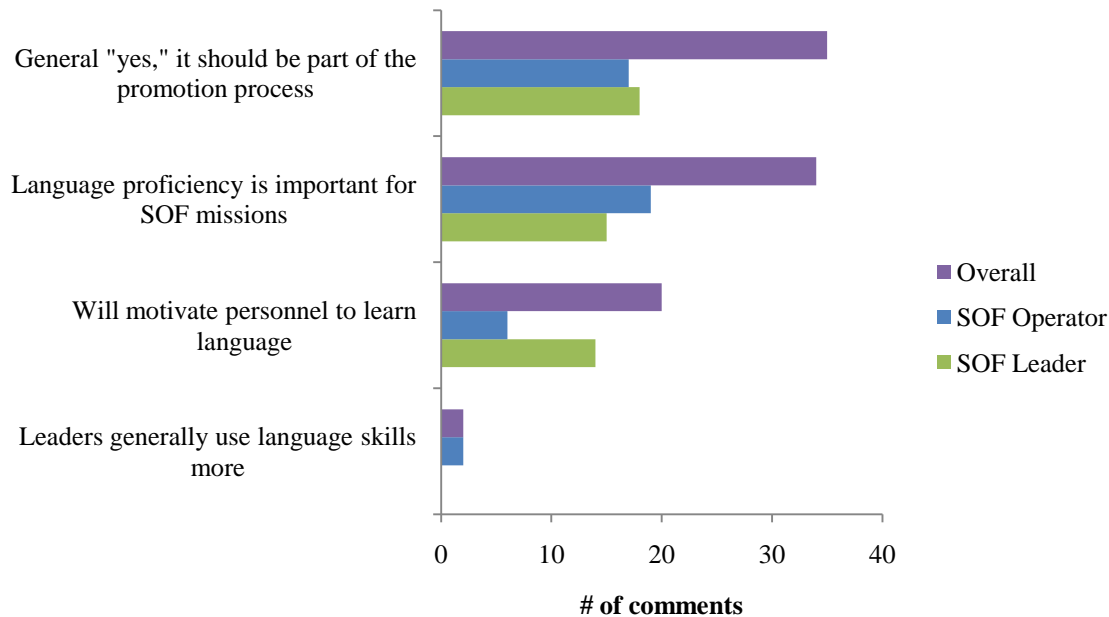
“That would provide native speakers an unfair advantage over school trained speakers of all languages.”

SOF Leader, Deployed SO unit

Reasons why language proficiency should be considered part of the promotion process. SOF operators and leaders provided reasons why language proficiency *should* be considered part of the promotion process ($n = 91$; Figure 6, p. 16). Additionally, some respondents explained that language should be

considered under certain conditions (e.g., only if language training is offered to everyone equally; $n = 44$; Figure 7, p. 18).

Figure 6. Comments Advocating for Inclusion of Language Proficiency in Promotion Process



Note. Comment code (i.e., theme) definitions are presented in Appendix C. A complete list of the theme frequencies is presented in Appendix D.

Many comments generally advocated for language proficiency to be considered part of the promotion process ($n = 35$). Some of these comments stated that this consideration would reward those who take the time to acquire or maintain their official or required AOR language.

"Reward guys that take the time to learn the language"

SOF Operator, 5th SFG

"Members who take the time and effort to maintain or increase their language skills should be given consideration for increased advancement opportunities."

SOF Operator, WARCUM

"Performance should always be a factor in promotion."

SOF Operator, 7th SFG

Another reason provided for why language proficiency should be part of the promotion process was that language proficiency is important for SOF missions ($n = 34$). These comments discussed the importance of language to SOF mission success and how SOF operators with language proficiency are assets to their teams.

“Proficiency in your language is essential to mission completion. If someone is not mission capable, they should not be promoted.”

SOF Operator, Deployed SO unit

“Language capabilities make you a more effective and productive team member”

SOF Operator, 7th SFG

“Language is a requirement to be an SF Operator. It is another in a long list of capabilities that sets us apart from, and above, others. If we promote someone who can't speak a language, we are lowering the standard of performance. I equate speaking a language to MOS proficiency. I don't want a commo man who can't work radios running my team, why should language be any different?”

SOF Operator, 10th SFG

Many comments supported the idea of language proficiency as a consideration in the promotion process under certain conditions (Figure 7, p. 18). The most frequently mentioned condition was that proficiency should be included in the promotion process only if alternative considerations (e.g., bonus points) are given ($n = 54$). Some of these comments suggested that language proficiency should improve an individual's chances of promotion, but should not deter promotion (i.e., should not count against the individual).

“it should be a positive mark for promotion points and/or boards, but not negative if there's not appropriate resources to support the NCO”

SOF Operator, 95th CAB

“Language should only be an enhancement to promotion, not a requirement.”

SOF Operator, 5th SFG

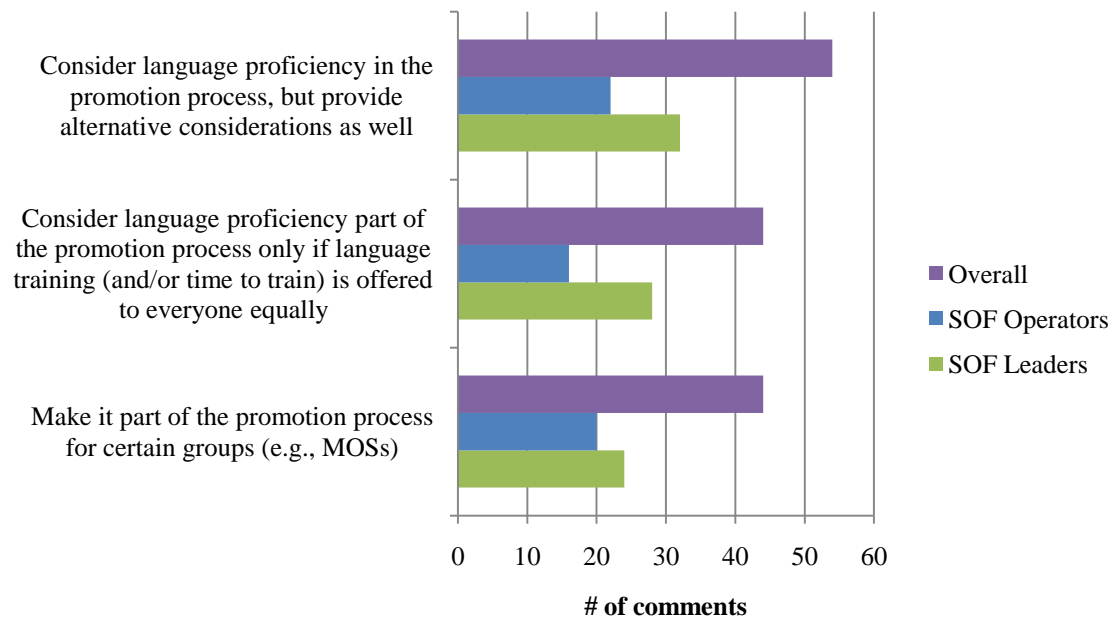
“It should be a plus, but should not hold an individual back.”

SOF Leader, 20th SFG

“It can and should be used to distinguish the best of the possible selections - but it should not prevent promotion.”

SOF Leader, 95th CAB

Figure 7. Comments Advocating for Inclusion of Language Proficiency in Promotion Process under Certain Conditions



Note. Comment code (i.e., theme) definitions are presented in Appendix C. A complete list of the theme frequencies is presented in Appendix D.

Comments also advocated for including language proficiency in the promotion process for certain positions in the organization, such as certain military occupational specialties (MOSs) that require advanced language skills ($n = 44$).

“Depends on your MOS and assigned unit. If you are in a mission where the target language is what you need to use then maybe.”

SOF Operator, USSOCOM operational unit

“Only if it is a requirement for the duty position.”

SOF Leader, 4th MISG

Lastly, some comments advocated for including proficiency in the promotion process only if all SOF operators receive the same language training opportunities ($n = 44$).

“if it is made a consideration than everyone needs the opportunity to receive the same training”

SOF Operator, 95th CAB

“But the force must make sure that all in the unit had a chance to complete the language process”

SOF Operator, 95th CAB

“Language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process ONLY if all SOF soldiers receive a commensurate amount of training.”

SOF Operator, 1st SFG

“Only if the opportunity to train in a foreign language is equally available to all special operators.”

SOF Leader, USSOCOM headquarters

Barriers. Some comments identified barriers to language learning and maintenance that may make the inclusion of language proficiency in the promotion process unfair (Figure 8, p. 20). The most frequently discussed barriers were lack of language learning aptitude and lack of time (mostly due to deployments).

Lack of language learning aptitude:

“Not everyone is capable of becoming proficient in their target language as required. I’m a perfect example, but I have been successful nonetheless.”

SOF Operator, SWCS Staff

“Simply, not everyone has the [...] ability to learn a second or third language and should not have to worry about it for promotion sake.”

SOF Operator, Other SOF Organization

“language skill is an aptitude, for some maybe a gift, but for other very talented individuals language is just not a skill set they will ever be good at.”

SOF Leader, Deployed SO unit

Not enough time:

“The availability of time to maintain/develop language skills will vary greatly with each individual. A staff member may have significantly more opportunity than a member of a tactical element.”

SOF Operator, 10th SFG

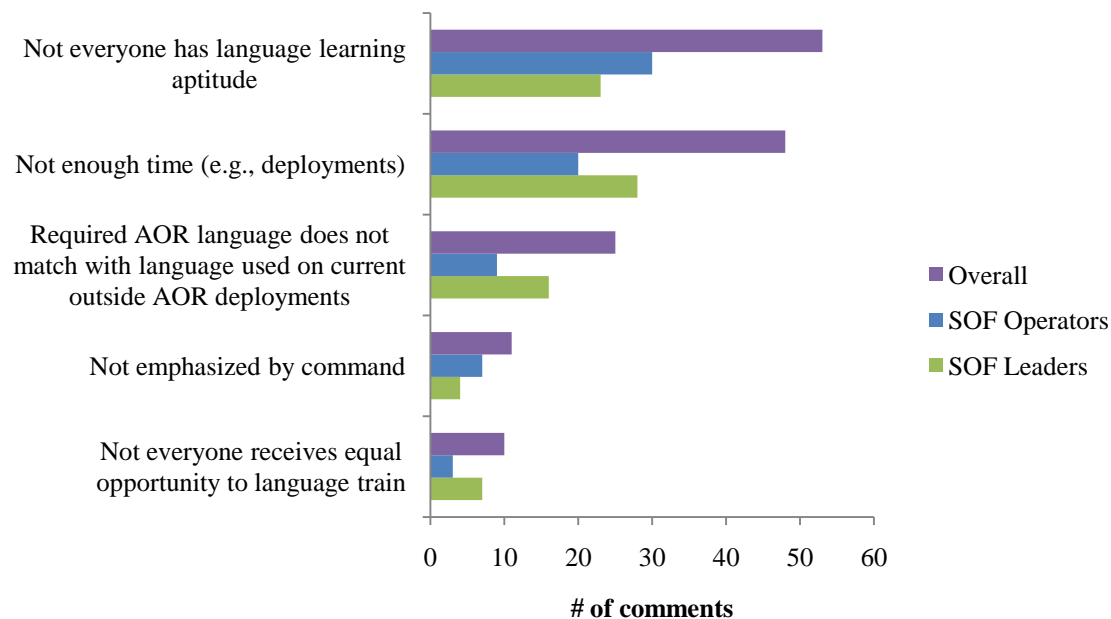
“Some individuals have been too busy deploying to be able to attend language training. 3 deployments in as many years makes it hard to attend formal language training.”

SOF Operator, 95th CAB

“not all units give the same time for training, maintenance, someone with a higher OPTEMP could suffer more than someone that sits at home station and does nothing but have time to study language”

SOF Operator, Deployed SO unit

Figure 8. Barriers That Can Affect Language Learning and Maintenance



Note. Comment code (i.e., theme) definitions are presented in Appendix C. A complete list of the theme frequencies is presented in Appendix D.

Focus Group Discussions

Consistent with survey comments, focus group discussions explained that not everyone has the ability to learn a language.

“The problem I can see with that is maybe it’s just one of those guys who had a lot of trouble learning the language. But if he could be great at every other aspect of his job, does that mean someone else advancing over him just because out of 10 skill sets there’s one he’s weak in?”

SOF Operator, MARSOC

One participant pointed out that attending language training can lead to SOF operators missing other training that would count toward their promotion/career advancement.

Participant: *“Another incentive we’ve been looking at in group is—it’s talking about sending a guy off to DLI for long periods of time, he’s going to miss LPOs, he misses milestones. Now, you have to have, in the enlisted community, a way of rewarding a guy, not punishing him. Because he gets punished now if he’s out of—“*

Moderator: *“He’s missing other critical training.”*

Participant: *“Yes, he’s missing sniper, combat swimmer, ROS, all that stuff. He’s just missing things. So if this would be a qualification for him that would advance him—that’s looked at positively—“*

Moderator: *“Career advancement, promotion.”*

Participant: “Yes.”

SOF Operator, WARCOM

SECTION III: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Providing SOF operators with opportunities for career advancement based on their language proficiency is one potential way to motivate them to acquire and maintain proficiency. However, the decision to include language proficiency in the promotion process should not be made without considering the potential benefits and consequences, many of which were identified by SOF operators and leaders as part of the 2009 SOF LCNA project. Overall, SOF operators and leaders offered mixed opinions on whether language proficiency should be considered in the promotion process, with the largest percentage of operators (51%) and leaders (41%) indicating that it should not be considered in the promotion process.

Although language is important for successfully executing SOF mission tasks (see *Inside AOR Use of Language*, Technical Report #2010011010), language proficiency tied to specific ILR levels is not currently part of the SOF promotion process. Although not all job-related requirements should be tied to promotion, it is important to consider the costs of excluding an important skill, such as language proficiency, from promotion decisions. For example, focus group discussions and survey comments indicated that language training, which is time intensive, often takes away from other training opportunities that build skills considered in the promotion process. When given the choice to dedicate time to developing language proficiency or to develop other SOF skills that are included in the promotion process, SOF operators will most likely choose to spend their time on training activities that are included in the promotion process. Therefore, depending on your perspective, including or not including language proficiency in the promotion process has a cost. Decision-makers must consider the cost of both options and determine which choice maximizes the incentive value of promotion for achieving organizational goals, including increased language proficiency.

Feedback provided from the SOF community related to this issue indicates that views are mixed in terms of support/opposition for including language proficiency in the promotion process. Approximately half of SOF operators opposed including language in the promotion process, while about one quarter of the remaining respondents favored its inclusion, and the other quarter endorsed a “maybe” response. In general, SOF leaders favored inclusion of language in the promotion process more than SOF operators, although opinions were still mixed. These quantitative findings highlight the complexity of the issue.

Both SOF operators and leaders provided open-ended comments to expand upon their quantitative ratings, and these comments can be used to develop recommendations for structuring policy related to including language proficiency in the promotion process so that it is the most effective and gains the most support from the SOF community. The following recommendations (associated with findings from this study; see Section II) are provided for decision-makers who may consider including language proficiency as part of SOF promotion policy:

- *Carefully consider the appropriate emphasis on language proficiency in relation to other SOF skills already included in promotion policy.* While several respondents commented that language proficiency is important for SOF missions, the most common theme expressed in open-ended comments was that language proficiency does not indicate good leadership or other SOF skills. Being promoted in a rank-based system implies that one is ready for more responsibility for and

leadership of others. The comments suggest that language proficiency is viewed as necessary for the job and mission but not related to this increasing leadership and responsibility in SOF or to other SOF skills that are mastered over time. Furthermore, of those who endorsed including language in the promotion process with a caveat, the most common caveat was to include considerations in addition to language. Based on these perspectives, language proficiency should not be viewed as compensatory for deficiencies in other critical experiences and skills that demonstrate readiness for promotion. Language should be viewed as an important skill and integrated into the system as appropriate to achieve command objectives.

- *When developing policy, consider the implications for native speakers of the language.* One of the most common concerns expressed in the comments was that including language proficiency in the promotion policy would provide an unfair advantage for native speakers of the language. Research demonstrates that perceptions of whether or not personnel have equitable opportunity for promotion can influence whether personnel perceive the promotion process as fair (Greenberg, 1987). SOF operators who are non-native speakers are likely to dedicate more time to language learning and maintenance than native speakers, assuming that native speakers are assigned to their native language. This inequity is likely to affect the perceived fairness of including language proficiency in the promotion process. Appropriate caveats should be made to ensure that the policy is not perceived as favoring or biased toward native speakers of the language.
- *When developing policy, consider both language difficulty and proficiency level.* Just as foreign language incentive pay (i.e., Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus [FLPB]) includes consideration of both language difficulty and level of proficiency, a promotion policy that includes language ability should do the same. Once again, this will ensure that SOF community members perceive the policy to be fair. Another situation to consider is when SOF operators are proficient in multiple languages. In these cases, like for foreign language incentive pay (i.e., FLPB), the promotion process could recognize proficiency in languages other than a SOF operators' official or required AOR language as fulfillment of the language requirement. This consideration could be especially important given the current operational environment, which requires many SOF operators to deploy outside their area of responsibility (AOR) and, therefore, use a language other than their required AOR language.
- *Be aware of barriers that may interfere with acquisition and maintenance of language proficiency and how those barriers may impact promotion policy.* The most common barriers identified by SOF personnel were lack of time (due to deployments) and lack of language learning aptitude. Providing multiple routes to the same goal (i.e., promotion) will most likely lead to the best outcomes. As some respondents suggested, it may make sense to treat language ability as an enhancer rather than an inhibitor of advancement. Another barrier that can have implications for the perceived fairness of including language in the promotion policy is the lack of opportunity for SOF operators to use and practice their language abilities due to outside AOR deployments (*Barriers to Language Acquisition and Maintenance*, Technical Report #2010011024). For example, if a SOF operator's official or required AOR language is Chinese, but the operator never deployed to or visited a Chinese-speaking region or community, then this individual does not have the opportunity to use his or her language skills in the field and,

therefore, this individual will have a more difficult time maintaining or improving his or her proficiency.

Overall, there are many issues to consider when deciding whether to include language proficiency as part of the promotion process for SOF. However, if these issues can be addressed, opportunity for promotion would be a powerful incentive for SOF operators to acquire and maintain language skills. The inclusion of language proficiency into the SOF promotion process would demonstrate the importance of language skills to SOF missions. USSOCOM policymakers must make an important decision about whether to more strongly integrate language proficiency into the promotion process, which will involve considering the true importance of language as a SOF skill. However, the consequences should be carefully considered. If language is integrated into the promotion system, the requirement could become a barrier to promotion for some and create other issues. How the language requirement is structured and which issues are considered will determine its impact for individuals and the SOF community. If a decision is made to include proficiency in the promotion process, the following issues will need to be addressed when structuring the requirement to avoid resistance from those affected: 1) prioritization of language proficiency in relation to other SOF skills, 2) consideration of impact on native versus non-native speakers, 3) consideration of language difficulty and language level, and 4) consideration of barriers. Another option for including language in the promotion process would be to include maintenance of the minimum language proficiency standard into the promotion policy. This would enforce the minimum proficiency requirement already in place for SOF operators and would further motivate operators to maintain their proficiency because of its impact on career advancement.

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ABOUT SWA CONSULTING INC.

SWA Consulting Inc. (formerly Surface, Ward, and Associates) provides analytics and evidence-based solutions for clients using the principles and methods of industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology. Since 1997, SWA has advised and assisted corporate, non-profit and governmental clients on:

- Training and development
- Performance measurement and management
- Organizational effectiveness
- Test development and validation
- Program/training evaluation
- Work/job analysis
- Needs assessment
- Selection system design
- Study and analysis related to human capital issues
- Metric development and data collection
- Advanced data analysis

One specific practice area is analytics, research, and consulting on foreign language and culture in work contexts. In this area, SWA has conducted numerous projects, including language assessment validation and psychometric research; evaluations of language training, training tools, and job aids; language and culture focused needs assessments and job analysis; and advanced analysis of language research data.

Based in Raleigh, NC, and led by Drs. Eric A. Surface and Stephen J. Ward, SWA now employs close to twenty I/O professionals at the masters and PhD levels. SWA professionals are committed to providing clients the best data and analysis with which to make solid data-driven decisions. Taking a scientist-practitioner perspective, SWA professionals conduct model-based, evidence-driven research and consulting to provide the best answers and solutions to enhance our clients' mission and business objectives. SWA has competencies in measurement, data collection, analytics, data modeling, systematic reviews, validation, and evaluation.

For more information about SWA, our projects, and our capabilities, please visit our website (www.swa-consulting.com) or contact Dr. Eric A. Surface (esurface@swa-consulting.com) or Dr. Stephen J. Ward (sward@swa-consulting.com).

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APPENDIX A: ABOUT THE LCNA PROJECT

In 2003-2004, the Special Operations Forces Language Office (SOFLO) sponsored the *SOF Language Transformation Strategy Needs Assessment Project* to inform the development of a language transformation strategy in response to a GAO report (2003). This *SOF Language Transformation Strategy Needs Assessment Project* collected current-state information about language usage, proficiency, training, and policy issues (e.g., Foreign Language Proficiency Pay, FLPP) from SOF personnel, SOF unit leaders, and other personnel involved in SOF language. The project used multiple data collection methods and provided the SOFLO with valid data to develop a comprehensive language transformation strategy and advocate for the SOF perspective on language issues within the DoD community.

In a continuing effort to update knowledge of language and culture needs while informing strategic plan development, the SOFLO commissioned the *2009 SOF Language and Culture Needs Assessment Project* (LCNA) to reassess the language and culture landscape across the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and develop a strategy for the next five years. Data were collected between March and November, 2009 from personnel in the SOF community, including SOF operators and leaders. Twenty-three focus groups were conducted between March and June, 2009. A comprehensive, web-based survey for both SOF operators and leaders was launched on 26 October and closed on 24 November, 2009.

This project's findings will be disseminated through reports and briefings (see Appendix A, Figure 1). Two foundational reports document the methodology and participants associated with this project. The remaining reports are organized in three tiers. Twenty-five *Tier I* reports focus on specific, limited issues (e.g., *Inside AOR Use of Language*). *Tier II* reports integrate and present the most important findings across related *Tier I* reports (e.g., *Use of Language and Culture on Deployment*) while including additional data and analysis on the topic. Most, but not all, *Tier I* reports will roll into *Tier II* reports. One *Tier III* report presents the most important findings, implications, and recommendations across all topics explored in this project. The remaining *Tier III* reports present findings for specific SOF organizations [e.g., Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Special Forces (SF) Command]. All *Tier III* reports are associated with a briefing. Report topics are determined by the SOFLO and subject to change.

In June, 2009, the GAO reported that the Department of Defense is making progress toward transforming language and regional proficiency capabilities but still does not have a strategic plan in place to continue development that includes actionable goals and objectives. The findings from this study can be used by the SOFLO and leaders at USSOCOM to continue strategic planning and development in this area.

This project design, logistics, data collection, initial analysis and first eight reports of this project were conducted by SWA Consulting Inc. (SWA) under a subcontract with SRC (SR20080668 (K142); Prime # N65236-08-D-6805). The additional reports are funded under a separate contracting vehicle with Gemini Industries Inc. [GEM02-ALMBOS-0018 (10210SWA-1); Prime # USZA22-02-D-0015]. For questions or more information about the SOFLO and this project, please contact Mr. Jack Donnelly (john.donnelly@socom.mil). For specific questions related to data collection or reports associated with this project, please contact Dr. Eric A. Surface (esurface@swa-consulting.com) or Dr. Reanna Poncheri Harman (rpharman@swa-consulting.com) with SWA Consulting Inc.

Appendix A, Figure 1. Report Overview



Note: Foundation reports are referenced by every other report. Colors represent *Tier I* reports that roll (integrate) into an associated *Tier II* report. Reports in black are final reports on the topic but may be cited by other reports. *Tier II* reports roll into the *Tier III* reports. All *Tier III* reports include an associated briefing.

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

Participants

Focus Group Participants

Twenty-three focus groups were conducted with 126 SOF personnel across the SOF community. Focus groups were conducted with Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), Naval Special Warfare (WARCOM), and United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC; *Participation Report*, Technical Report #2010011003 for participant details). Section II of this report presents focus group discussions about promotion/career advancement as an incentive for SOF operators to acquire and maintain language proficiency (*Methodology Report*, Technical Report #2010011002 for the focus group interview guide).

Survey Participants

Survey respondents received the SOF operator version of the promotion items if they indicated one of the following SOF community roles:

- SOF Operator
- SOF Operator assigned to other duty
- Currently in the training pipeline
- MI Linguist or 09L assigned or attached to a SOF unit

Survey respondents received the SOF leader version of the promotion items if they indicated one of the following SOF community roles:

- SOF Unit Commander
- Command Language Program Manager (CLPM)
- Language office personnel

The focus of this report is on SOF operator and leader perspectives; therefore, personnel currently in the training pipeline, MI Linguist/09L, CLPM, and language office personnel perspectives are not included in this report. For further details on participation and attrition rates, please refer to the *Participation Report* (Technical Report #2010011003).

Measures

Closed-ended Item

Respondents received an item that elicited their opinions about whether or not language should be considered part of the promotion process: *Do you think that language should be considered part of the promotion process?* Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely not* to 5 = *definitely yes*). For presentation purposes, responses were combined into three categories: No, Yes, and Maybe. *Definitely not* and *Probably not* responses were included in the “No” category; *Maybe* responses remained in the “Maybe” category, and *Definitely yes* and *Probably yes* responses were included in the “Yes” category.

Open-ended Item

To gather more information about respondents’ perceptions of whether or not language proficiency should be a consideration in the promotion process, respondents received an open-ended comment: *Please*

use the space below to provide any comments you have regarding making language proficiency a consideration in the promotion process.

Analyses

The closed-ended item was analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. To compare responses across groups of participants, inferential statistics (e.g., chi square tests, t-tests) were used to determine if any observed differences are likely to exist in the broader population of interest.

Among the groups compared included:

- Operators vs. leaders
- Official or required AOR language difficulty
- Speaking proficiency in official or required AOR language
- Pay grade (within E, WO, and O)
- Position (Commander, SWOA/SEA, Staff Officer)
- Level of command
- SOF component
- Army SOF type (i.e., Civil Affairs, Military Information Support Group, Special Forces)
- USASOC unit
- Tenure (i.e., how long they have been in their current position)

No significant differences were found for level of command, SOF component, and tenure. Other relevant differences are presented in the body of the report.

For the open-ended comments, raters created a content code (i.e., theme) list based on available responses for the open-ended item. A primary rater then coded each response and a secondary rater coded 30% of the responses. Raters determined the consistency of codes and discussed any disagreements to consensus. The frequency of occurrence for each theme is presented in this report. A similar process was used to code the focus group data.

For further details on these methods, please refer to the *Methodology Report* (Technical Report #2010011002).

APPENDIX C: COMMENT THEMES

SOF operators and leaders were given the opportunity to provide comments in response to the following survey prompt: *Please use the space below to provide any comments you have regarding making language proficiency a consideration in the promotion process.*

All survey comments were content analyzed and common themes extracted. The resulting themes are provided below, with a definition of each theme and verbatim exemplar comments that illustrate the theme. For more information about this study's content analysis process, please refer to the LCNA *Methodology Report* (Technical Report # 2010011002). Focus group comments were analyzed using different themes; please refer to the *Methodology Report* for more information.

Note: Exemplar comments are presented verbatim and are uncorrected for spelling and other mistakes.

Yes, language proficiency should be a consideration in the promotion process

- General “yes,” it should be part of the promotion process
 - Definition: General statement that language proficiency should be part of the SOF promotion process. Includes general statements that proficiency is a reflection of effort and should be rewarded.
 - “In SF, minimum language proficiency is required to graduate the Qualification Course. Obviously if it's a requirement to be SF, it should be considered.”
- Language proficiency is important for SOF missions
 - Definition: Discussion of the importance of language to SOF job skills.
 - “If a Soldier has the discipline and motivation to maintain his language skills, it is an excellent indicator of his commitment to the mission and his overall ability to operate in SOF.”
 - “Language capabilities make you a more effective and productive team member”
- Will motivate personnel to learn language
 - Definition: Discussion of how language proficiency should be part of the SOF promotion system because it will motivate personnel to learn language.
 - “If considered as part of the promotion process I think it will drive Soldiers to work harder at learning the language.”

Yes, language proficiency should be a consideration in the promotion process, under certain conditions:

- Consider language proficiency in the promotion process, but provide alternative considerations as well (e.g., bonus points)
 - Definition: Comments about how language proficiency should be a consideration in the SOF promotion process, but it should not be a requirement or other skills should be considered as well.
 - “It can and should be used to distinguish the best of the possible selections - but it should not prevent promotion.”
- Consider language proficiency part of the promotion process only if language training (and/or time to train) is offered to everyone equally (includes reducing outside distracters)
 - Definition: Comments about how language proficiency should be a consideration in the SOF promotion process, but only if language training or time to train is offered to everyone equally.

- “Until language training is given to all soldiers in equal measure, it is unfair to hold someone back from promotion because their unit operations tempo is very high, they didn't have the opportunity to attend language training, etc.”
- Make it part of the promotion system for linguists, language-coded MOSs, certain pay grades (e.g., 35P, 37F; E1 through E6)
 - Definition: Comments about how language proficiency should be considered in the SOF promotion process, but only for certain military occupational specialties (MOSs) that require language.
 - “Language should only be considered part of the promotion process if it is your MOS”

No, language proficiency should not be a consideration in the promotion process

- General “no,” it should not be part of the promotion process
 - Definition: Comments that generally state that language should not be part of the promotion system.
 - “I feel it shouldn't be required.”
- Language proficiency is not an indicator of good SOF/leadership skills
 - Definition: Comments that language proficiency (or lack of language proficiency) does not indicate one's SOF/leadership skills. Includes discussion about leaders generally not using language skills as much as operators.
 - “I know excellent leaders who are terrible with foreign languages. I want people with leadership skills in charge.”
- Unfair advantage to native speakers
 - Definition: Discussion of the unfair advantage native speakers would have if language proficiency became part of the SOF promotion system.
 - “That would provide native speakers an unfair advantage over school trained speakers of all languages.”
- Unfair for those with higher language difficulty
 - Definition: Discussion of how it would be unfair to include language proficiency as part of the SOF promotion system because some personnel are assigned to more difficult languages (i.e., Category IV languages); therefore, it may be more difficult for them to reach the same proficiency level than for personnel in a less difficult assigned language (i.e., Category I).
 - “someone who has a 3/3 in Spanish should not be given promotion points over a 1/1 in Chinese. the languages are not equal and the training time required is not equal”
- Can rely on interpreters/translators instead of including language proficiency in promotion process
 - Definition: Discussion of how language proficiency should not be considered part of the promotion process because SOF can rely on interpreters instead of building proficiency.
 - “Because the use of interpreters is so prevalent, I don't think that it should be part of the promotion process because knowing a language isn't a deciding factor to whether you are a competent soldier in your job.”

- FLPB is enough motivation
 - Definition: Discussion of how language proficiency should not be considered part of the promotion process because FLPB is sufficient motivation for SOF personnel.
 - “I believe the pay incentive is enough for individuals to apply themselves.”
- Language proficiency test is unfair
 - Definition: Discussion of how language proficiency should not be considered part of the promotion process because the language proficiency tests are unfair (e.g., test does not accurately measure an individual’s ability to use the language).
 - “As of now, the DLPT V is not equally distributed among languages, nor a true reflection on language ability”
- There are equally or more important requirements (e.g., shooting)
 - Definition: Discussion of how language proficiency should not be considered part of the promotion process because there are other requirements (e.g., shooting) that are equally or more important than language.
 - “While highly important there are a great deal of other skills (which aren't part of the promotion process) that are of equal or greater importance to over mission success”

Barriers to language learning and maintenance

- Not enough time (includes deployments)
 - Definition: Discussion of how deployments and other requirements take away from language training time.
 - “OPTEMPO for units vary, ergo the ability to train and prepare for the DLPT is not equal.”
- Not emphasized by command
 - Definition: Discussion of how lack of command support for language is a barrier to language acquisition and maintenance.
 - “It was always supposed to be a part of that process, but it has been largely ignored due to (in my opinion) command/promotion authority apathy.”
- Not everyone receives equal opportunity to language train (no indication that it should or should not be included in promotion process)
 - Definition: Discussion about how all SOF personnel do not receive the same language training opportunities.
 - “The Army doesn't provide the time as previously states”
- Not everyone has language learning aptitude
 - Definition: Discussion about how all SOF personnel do not have the same language learning aptitude.
 - “not everyone has the capability to pick up on a language.”
- Required AOR language does not match with language(s) used on current outside AOR deployments
 - Definition: Discussion about how some SOF personnel are deployed outside their AOR and, therefore, do not use their official or required AOR language.
 - “Some Soldier deploy to a different AOR then their language”

Other

- Comments about FLPB (not including “FLPB is enough motivation”)
 - Definition: Discussion about FLPB, not including comments stating that FLPB is a sufficient incentive.
 - “Money is the best incentive to get people to study their language.”
- Other comments
 - Definition: Discussion about topics that are unrelated to the question, including comments that may or may not be related to language training or other language-related topics.
 - “Language is only one of the things I have to stay on top of.”

APPENDIX D: COMMENT THEME FREQUENCIES*Appendix D, Table 1. Comment theme frequencies*

Theme	Overall	Operators	Leaders
Yes, it should be part of the promotion process			
General “yes,” it should be part of the promotion process	35	17	18
Language proficiency is important for SOF missions	34	19	15
Will motivate personnel to learn language	20	6	14
Leaders generally use language skills more	2	2	0
Yes, it should be part of the promotion process (with caveat)			
Consider language proficiency in the promotion process, but provide alternative considerations as well	54	22	32
Make it part of the promotion system for linguists, language-coded MOSs, certain pay grades	44	20	24
Consider language proficiency part of the promotion process only if language training (and/or time to train) is offered to everyone equally	44	16	28
No, it should not be part of the promotion process			
Language proficiency does not indicate good SOF/leadership skills	71	38	33
Unfair for those with higher language difficulty	37	13	24
Unfair advantage to native speakers	33	16	17
General “no,” it should not be part of the promotion process	33	22	11
Language proficiency test is unfair	8	4	4
FLPB is enough motivation	3	1	2
Can rely on interpreters/translators instead of including language proficiency in promotion process	2	2	0
There are equally or more important requirements (e.g., shooting)	7	4	3

Note. Some comments discussed more than one theme. Therefore, the number of themes may not equal the number of comments.

Appendix D, Table 1 (continued). Comment theme frequencies

Theme	Overall	Operators	Leaders
Barriers			
Not enough time (e.g., deployments)	48	20	28
Not everyone has language learning aptitude	53	30	23
Required AOR language does not match with language(s) used on current outside AOR deployments	25	9	16
Not emphasized by command	11	7	4
Not everyone receives equal opportunity to language train	10	3	7
Other			
Other comments	56	27	29
Comments about FLPB (not including “FLPB is enough motivation”)	5	2	3

Note. Some comments discussed more than one theme. Therefore, the number of themes may not equal the number of comments.